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## THE GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BY THE EDITOR.

It may be laid down as a general rule that in the inauguration of any public enterprise there is to be found, in some degree at least, the element of self interest on the part of the author, or authors, of the project. Selfishness, like Truth at the bottom of the well, will be found somewhere beneath the surface. This proposition holds good in considering the facts attending the founding of the Georgia Historical Society. A hint of this is given in a statement on the part of one of the organizers, Dr. William Bacon Stevens, afterwards Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Pennsylvania, that "The splendid autographical collection of I. K. Tefft, Esq., together with the many valuable documents in his possession pertaining to the colonial and revolutionary history of Georgia, suggested the importance of such a society, and it was immediately determined by Mr. Tefft and Mr. Wm. B. Stevens to proceed without delay to its formation." Evidence is not wanting to show that, through the means of his office as Corresponding Secretary, the former, who really proposed the scheme, added considerable material to his collection of autographs; and it was significant, to say the least, that Dr. Stevens had long before that expressed his intention to write a history of Georgia; and as soon as the new Society was fairly organized he was invited to take up that work under the Society's auspices. He did accomplish the task, and the Society contributed liberally to the fund for printing the two volumes, thus acquiring the ownership of a large number of copies, many of which are still in its possession.

Dr. Stevens added: "This measure was first decided on towards the close of April, 1839, and, at the suggestion of Mr. Tefft, the latter endeavored to prepare the way and awaken attention to the subject by two articles on this topic, which appeared in the Savannah Georgian of May following. These individuals were now joined by a third, Richard D. Arnold, M. D., and after many conferences as to the best method of procedure, they resolved to address a circular to those whom they thought would be interested in their design." So it happened that the first step towards the organization was taken by three gentlemen, and that of them Dr. Arnold alone was apparently entirely disinterested. But, notwithstanding the fact that self interest entered largely into this matter, we must give them credit for doing a good

thing, for the exhibition at that time of what we now call "public spirit;" and verily "their works do follow them."

The first meeting of the invited persons was held in the room of the Savannah Library Society, May 24, 1839, at which twenty-five were present, and then the names of twenty-seven others, who could not be present, were, by their consent, added to the list of those desiring to co-operate and become members. An adjourned meeting was held June 4, at which the organization of the Society was completed by the election of officers and the adoption of a constitution and by-laws, which had been submitted at the previous meeting and referred to a committee to be revised. The officers elected were:

President—Hon. John McPherson Berrien.

First Vice President—Hon. James M. Wayne.

Second Vice President—Hon. Wm. B. Bulloch.

Corresponding Secretary—I. K. Tefft, Esq.

Recording Secretary—Dr. Wm. Bacon Stevens.

Treasurer—George W. Hunter, Esq.

Librarian—Henry Kirk Preston, Esq.

Curators—Wm. Thorne Williams, Chas. S. Henry, John C. Nicoll, Wm. Law, Richard D. Arnold, Robert M. Charlton, Matthew Hall McAllister.

The society was incorporated by the Legislature in December, 1839, and by the terms of the act of incorporation the copies of the manuscripts obtained from the State Paper office in London, by Rev. C. W. Howard, agent of the State of Georgia, in that behalf, were deposited in the society's archives. Although the organization was not perfected until the month of June, it was decided to date the origin of the institution as the 12th of February—the day (new style) of the landing of General Oglethorpe.

In 1840, the first volume of the Society's Collections, was published, and this was followed in 1842 by the second volume. The first is now out of print.

Upon the petition of the society, in 1842, the City Council of Savannah granted to it a city lot on Liberty street for the erection of a library building, but as its situation was unsuitable, efforts were made in 1847 to purchase from the U. S. Government the lot on Bryan street, on which the Custom House formerly stood, that building having been destroyed in the great fire of 1820. These were successful, and to enable the society to pay for its new lot the City Council granted it the Liberty street lot in fee simple, with permission to sell it and devote the proceeds to the purchase of the Custom House lot.

In 1848 the Society issued in pamphlet form "A sketch of the Creek Country in the Years 1798 and 1799," by Col. Benjamin Hawkins, the earliest agent of the United States for Indian affairs, and, as it was then making preparations for building a library hall the late Wm. B. Hodgson, Esq., kindly offered to superintend and bear the expense of the publication of this work. His generous offer was accepted, and the pamphlet appeared as the first part of the third volume of the "Collections of the Georgia Historical Society."

Mr. Hodgson joined the Society shortly after his marriage with Miss Margaret Telfair and his taking up his residence in Savannah, and, because of his active interest in its affairs, he was elected a Curator on the 12th of February, 1845, and was annually thereafter re-elected to that office until February, 1870.

Judge Berrien held the presidency until 1841, when he was succeeded by the Hon. James M. Wayne who retired in 1854, when the former was again made President and continued in office until January, 1856. Then, on that occasion of the Society's anniversary, Judge Wayne resumed the position and retained it to the year 1862.

The society took possession of its new building on Bryan street in June, 1849. In the fall of this year the debt of the society, incurred by the erection of its hall, amounted to \$1,400, which sum was advanced by the late Dr. James P. Screven, with the understanding that it could be repaid at the convenience of the society. This debt was reduced by payments until it amounted, in February, 1852, to the sum of \$800; and at the anniversary meeting of that year Dr. Screven sent the following letter to the society:

Savannah, February 12, 1852.

"Hon. James M. Wayne, President:

"Dear Sir—I propose, with the permission of the society over which you preside, to cancel the mortgage held by me on its lot and improvements on Bryan street.

"This day being the anniversary of the society presents an appropriate occasion for the performance of an act which will free it from debt and enable it to extend the sphere of its usefulness. I have the honor to be respectfully yours,

"James P. Screven."

Besides this generous gift, Dr. Screven had originally subscribed \$200 towards the erection of the hall.

During the months of June and July, 1847, negotiations were carried on between the Georgia Historical Society and

the Savannah Library Society, looking to a union of these two institutions, which union was speedily effected without any serious opposition. By it the Georgia Historical Society secured for its library about 2,500 volumes.

From the time of the completion of the Society's hall, until the close of the war of secession, very little was done in the way of increasing the library, and nothing in the way of publishing. Shortly after the war, however, a fresh start was taken, more thought and attention were given to the wants of the library, and it was deemed advisable for the society, in order to place it on a footing with other historical societies of the country, to put forth a new volume of collections, as soon as practicable.

In saying that nothing was published during the period just mentioned, we mean that no volume of Collections had been issued. From time to time addresses had been delivered which were printed and distributed in pamphlet form, by Wm. Law, Robert M. Charlton, Wm. B. Stevens, Mitchell King, John E. Ward, Wm. A. Caruthers, Bishop Stephen Elliott, Samuel K. Talmage, Alonzo Church, a second lecture by Judge R. M. Charlton, a second by Hon. John E. Ward, Charles C. Jones, Jr., and a strong paper by Bishop Elliott (in February, 1866, while he was President, and less than a year before his death). The last was in the nature of a reply to a resolution of the Society asking him to suggest a plan to increase the usefulness of the Society. Following the death of Bishop Elliott, Mr. Solomon Cohen was appointed to deliver a eulogy on his life and character, and it was put into print.

In the meanwhile Dr. Thaddeus Mason Harris published his Biographical Memorials of James Oglethorpe, and dedicated it to the Society; and the two volumes of the History of Georgia, by Wm. B. Stevens (the first in 1847, and the second in 1859), prepared, as already mentioned, under the Society's auspices, came from the press and brought the institution more conspicuously before the people.

In the summer of 1870, when it was found that the library had increased to an extent which necessitated the procuring additional room in which to place the books, and when it was thought that the library should be removed to a more convenient and central location, various attempts were made to secure a lot for the erection of a building, or to lease some large building adapted to the purpose of a library. No definite action was taken in this matter until the spring of 1871, when an arrangement was made with

the Chatham Artillery by which the two upper floors of Armory Hall were leased by the Society for the term of five years, and accordingly, in June of that year, the library was removed to that building, where it remained until the completion of that elegant structure erected by Mrs. Margaret Telfair Hodgson for the Society, on the corner of Whitaker and Gaston streets, in memory of her husband, and called Hodgson Hall.

The next important incident in the history of the Society was the publication in 1871, of that very interesting volume by the late Anthony Barclay, Esq., relating the history of Hon. Richard Henry Wilde's alleged plagiarism in writing the beautiful poem beginning,

"My life is like the summer rose."

This history was written as a personal favor to the President of the Society, and read by him at one of the meetings, when, by a resolution, the work was ordered to be printed at the Society's expense, provided the consent of the author could be obtained. Permission was kindly given by Mr. Barclay, and in a short time afterwards appeared the beautiful little brochure entitled, "Wilde's Summer Rose; or the Lament of the Captive."

In 1873 a third volume of collections was published composed of the letters of Gen. Oglethorpe to the trustees of the colony from 1735 to 1744; letters of Sir James Wright, Governor of the Province of Georgia, to the English Secretaries of State, from 1773 to 1782; and a report on the condition of the province by Governor Wright, in reply to inquiries from the Earl of Dartmouth. The manuscript of the last named document was kindly given to the Society by G. W. J. DeRenne, Esq., who caused it to be copied at his own expense from the records in London. All the material of which this interesting volume is composed was obtained from England through the kindness of Mr. DeRenne, who volunteered to superintend the copying of the same for the Society during a visit to England, but his kindness and generosity did not stop here. In 1878, learning that Col. Charles C. Jones, Jr., of Augusta, had ready for the press a manuscript entitled "The Dead Towns of Georgia," he offered to bear the expense of its publication if the author would consent to its appearing as the fourth volume of the "Collections of the Georgia Historical Society." This request was readily complied with by Col. Jones, and in a short time the Society was, through the liberality of Mr. De-

Renne, presented with a large edition of a fourth volume of collections, containing the work on the "Dead Towns," and an interesting paper, reprinted from the London Magazine for the year 1745, entitled, "Itinerant Observations in America."

On the 26th of June 1871, William B. Hodgson, Esq., for many years a member of the Society, and for twenty-five years one of the curators, died while at the North, and his widow, desiring to erect to his memory a building bearing his name, proposed to grant it, when completed, to the Georgia Historical Society upon certain conditions, which, being submitted to the Society, were assented to, and the work of building commenced in 1873. While the work was in progress Mrs. Hodgson died without having made any provision for its completion. Her sister, Miss Mary Telfair, desiring to carry out the intentions of Mrs. Hodgson, gave instructions to the workmen to continue their labors until the building should be finished, and being her sister's residuary legatee, she made a deed in trust to General A. R. Lawton, for the use of the Society, of the lot and building thereon, "in an unfinished and incomplete state, but to be finished and completed at the proper cost and expense of the said Mary Telfair who does hereby charge the entire residuum of the estate of the said Margaret Telfair Hodgson, in her own hands now as residuary legatee, or in the hands of her executors, after her death, to such extent as will furnish the means and funds necessary to finish and complete said structure." Before the completion of the building Miss Telfair also died, but the work was carried on agreeably with the terms of the deed, and in September, 1875, the library was placed in Hodgson Hall. The formal dedication did not take place until the thirty-seventh anniversary of the Society, February 14th, 1876, when formal possession of it was delivered to the Society by the trustee, and the dedicatory address was delivered by the President, Hon. Henry R. Jackson.

Taking a backward step, we observe that the Hon. Charles S. Henry succeeded Judge Wayne as President in 1862, and served until his death, August 19, 1864. In less than a month later Bishop Stephen Elliott became President and his service came to a close by his sudden death on the 21st of December, 1866. Reluctantly Mr. John Stoddard consented to accept the office when he was chosen at the annual meeting, February 12, 1867, but declined a re-election the following year, when Hon. Edward J. Harden succeeded him, and held the office until death brought his term to a

close April 19, 1873. Mr. George W. J. DeRenne was elected President at the meeting held June 2, 1873, and, after hesitating, agreed to accept, but could not be persuaded to allow his name to be proposed for another election at the 1874 annual meeting. At that meeting Hon. Henry R. Jackson was the choice of the Society, and was President a little more than twenty-four years, his death on the 23rd of May 1898, bringing his long and most satisfactory term of service to an end.

In the year 1901 the fifth volume of Collections was issued in two parts. Part 1 was printed and paid for by the Savannah Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution who earnestly desired to have the manuscript of the Minutes of the Georgia Council of Safety, owned by the Society, published. Mr. W. J. DeRenne kindly offered to bear the expense of the publishing of the Order Book and Letter Book of General and Governor Samuel Elbert, in the Society's possession, and his offer was gratefully accepted, and the material forms the second part of volume five.

The sixth volume was published in 1904, and contains the Letters of Hon. James Habersham, 1756-1776.

Col. John Screven was elected President March 6, 1899, succeeding General Jackson, but his career was cut short after less than a year of useful service by his death January 9, 1900. Following him, Hon. George Anderson Mercer held the office from February 12, 1900, to April 5, 1907.

From 1909 to 1913 the seventh volume of Collections came from the press in three parts: part 1 being Letters of Montiano—Siege of St. Augustine; part 2, Oglethorpe Monument; and part 3, the Spanish Account of the Attack on the Colony of Georgia, etc.

Again, later in 1913 the eighth volume of Collections, containing the Letters of Joseph Clay, 1776-1793, and a list of ships and vessels entered at the port of Savannah for May, 1765, 1766 and 1767, saw the light.

Mr. Alexander Rudolf Lawton succeeded Hon. G. A. Mercer as President, April 5, 1907, and declined re-election in 1914, when Mr. William W. Mackall was elected and is still serving in a most acceptable way at this time.

In 1916 the Society published the ninth volume of Collections, and it is composed of the Letters of Benjamin Hawkins, 1796-1806.

In continuation of the list of addresses and other pamphlets already mentioned, the Society has issued a number of others which, for the want of space, are not here named.